

Prince, Heather (2019) Outdoor Learning in Primary Schools: Practice, Challenges and Opportunities. In: Ambleside Professoriate Lecture Series, 20 March 2019, University of Cumbria, Ambleside Campus. (Unpublished)

Downloaded from: <http://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/4568/>

*Usage of any items from the University of Cumbria's institutional repository 'Insight' must conform to the following fair usage guidelines.*

Any item and its associated metadata held in the University of Cumbria's institutional repository Insight (unless stated otherwise on the metadata record) may be copied, displayed or performed, and stored in line with the JISC fair dealing guidelines (available [here](#)) for educational and not-for-profit activities

**provided that**

- the authors, title and full bibliographic details of the item are cited clearly when any part of the work is referred to verbally or in the written form
- a hyperlink/URL to the original Insight record of that item is included in any citations of the work
- the content is not changed in any way
- all files required for usage of the item are kept together with the main item file.

**You may not**

- sell any part of an item
- refer to any part of an item without citation
- amend any item or contextualise it in a way that will impugn the creator's reputation
- remove or alter the copyright statement on an item.

The full policy can be found [here](#).

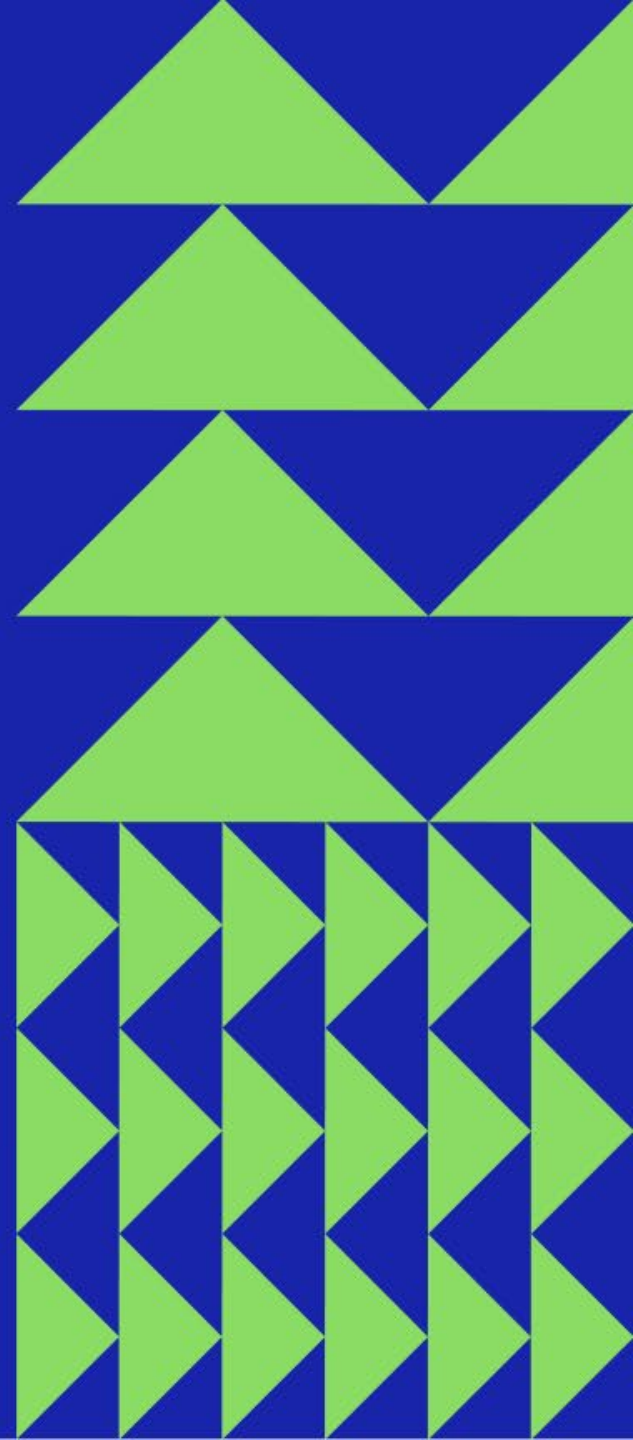
Alternatively contact the University of Cumbria Repository Editor by emailing [insight@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:insight@cumbria.ac.uk).

# Outdoor Learning in primary schools: Practice, challenges and opportunities

Dr Heather Prince

Associate Professor in Outdoor and Environmental  
Education

University of Cumbria, Ambleside Campus

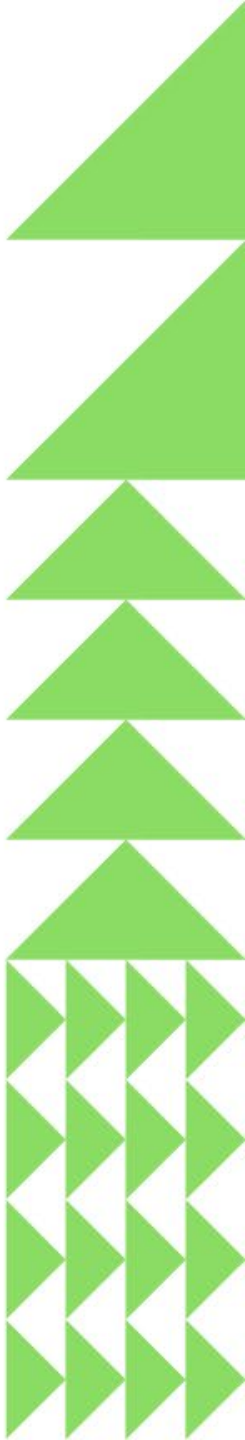


# Personal perspective and values

- Formal education as a framework for equality, diversity, inclusion and entitlement
- Importance of learning outdoors for children and young people
- Evidencing the value of outdoor learning to support teachers and educators, and inform policy and practice

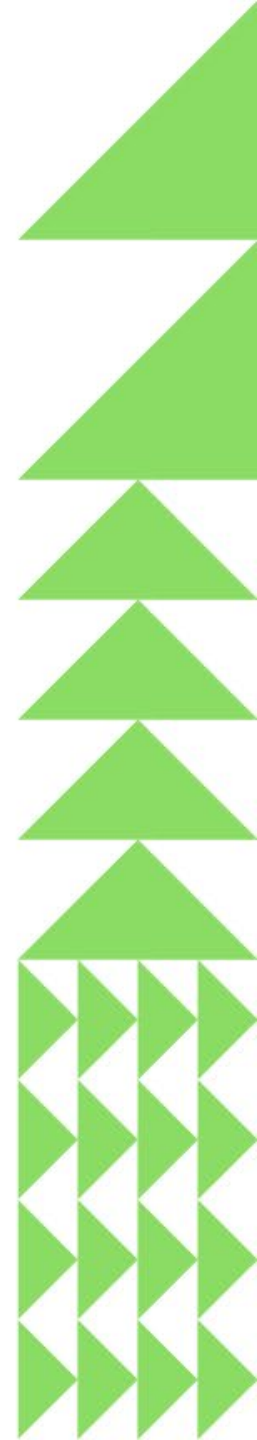


From this ...





# To this ...





and this ...





# It's not new



Charlotte Mason (1841 – 1923)

believed in learning

- through play
- through observing and examining the natural world
- through experiencing materials
- through great art
- through writers and great stories
- through building on previous experiences

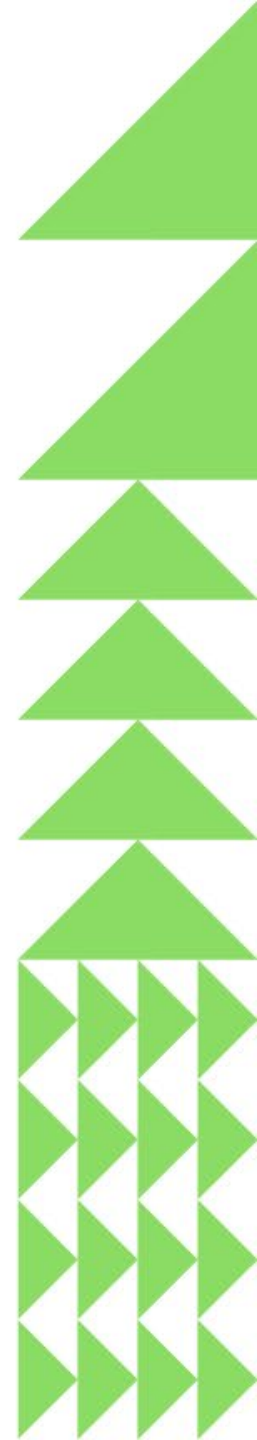








Students working with children



# It's not easy

views here [ow.ly/oOyN30o099q](https://ow.ly/oOyN30o099q)



**SEND provision in Cumbria will be inspected next week.**

Parents and carers have between Monday 11 and Tuesday 19 March to make their views known.

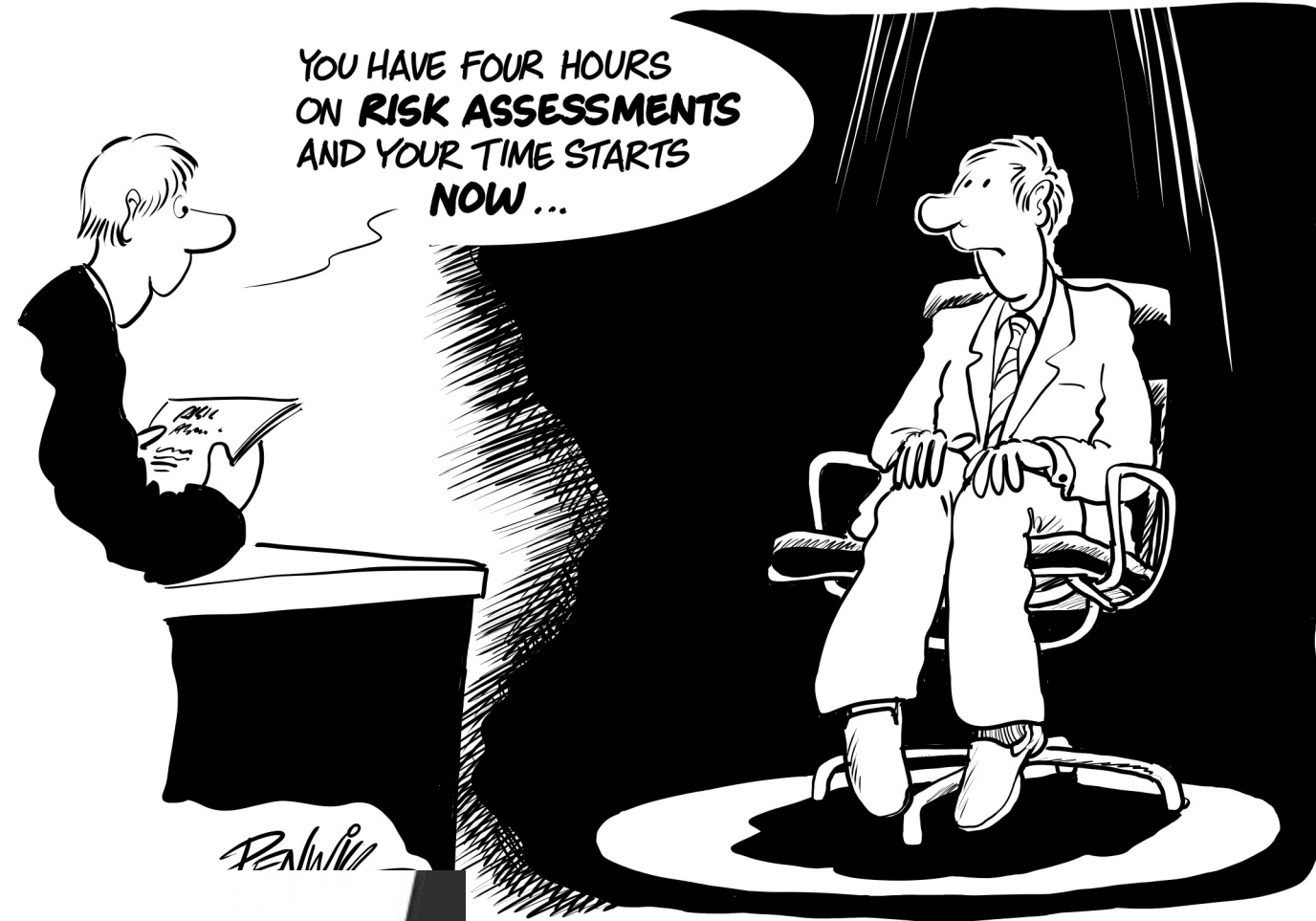


4 2



**Ofsted** @Ofstednews · 3h

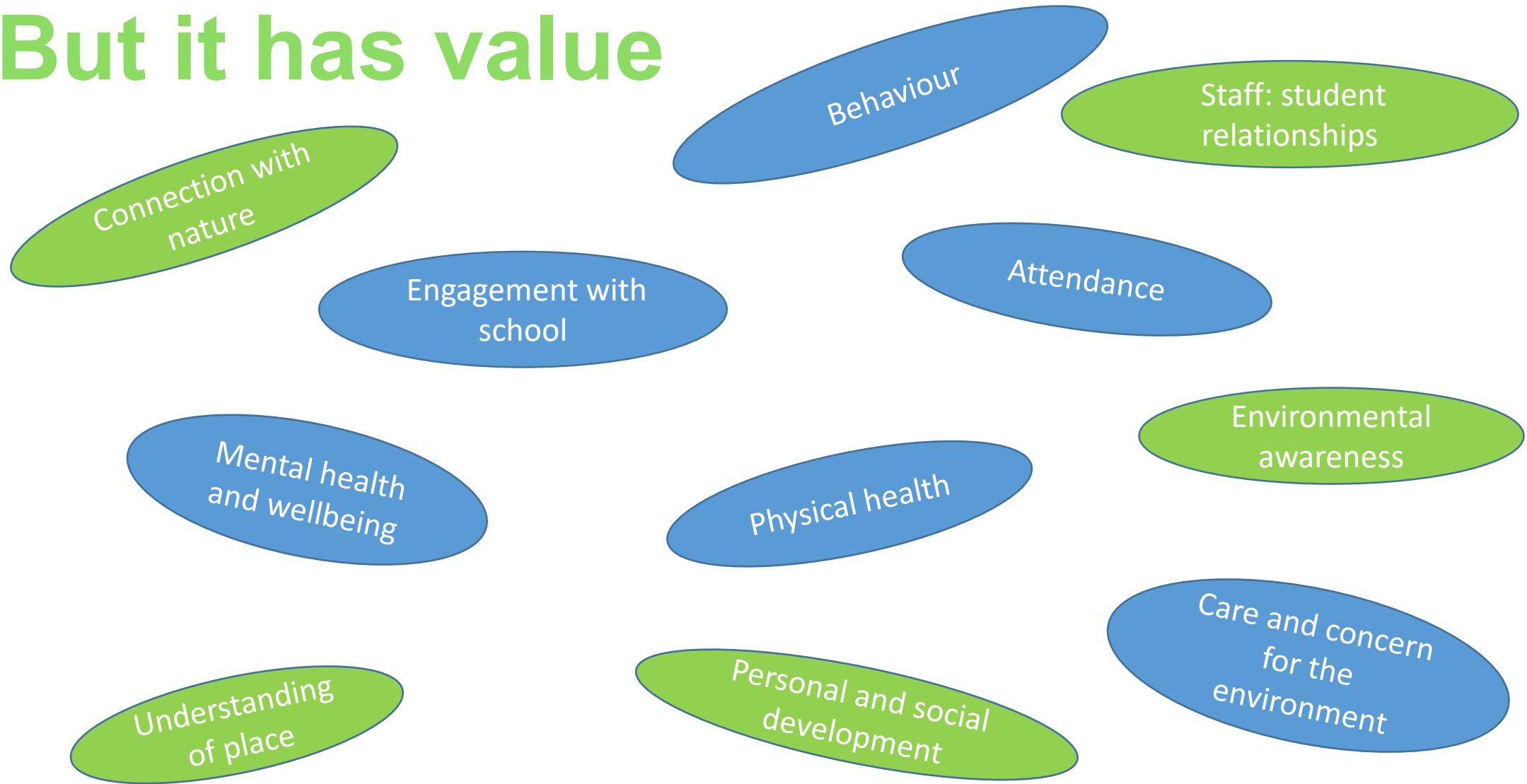
Schools in London aren't supported well enough when it comes to dealing with knife crime and need to be included in strong multi-agency partnerships - read our press release [ow.ly/p9Oa50n1h0s](https://ow.ly/p9Oa50n1h0s)



The National Curriculum in England Framework document



# But it has value



# There are opportunities

Outdoors as a  
creative space

Teacher values  
and confidence

Place-based  
learning

Relationships

Defra, 25 YEP

Physical activity

Personal  
development





# and more opportunities

The Aztecs  
Anne Frank

Speaking & listening  
Team building

The earth & space  
Forces & motion  
Pneumatics  
Rivers  
Our environment  
Healthy minds, healthy bodies  
Ourselves  
Living things and their habitats  
Local and world forest studies  
Imaginary worlds

Frank

Team build



# Pedagogy

Memorable

Experiential

Ownership

Creative

Exciting

Enabling

Challenging

Progressive

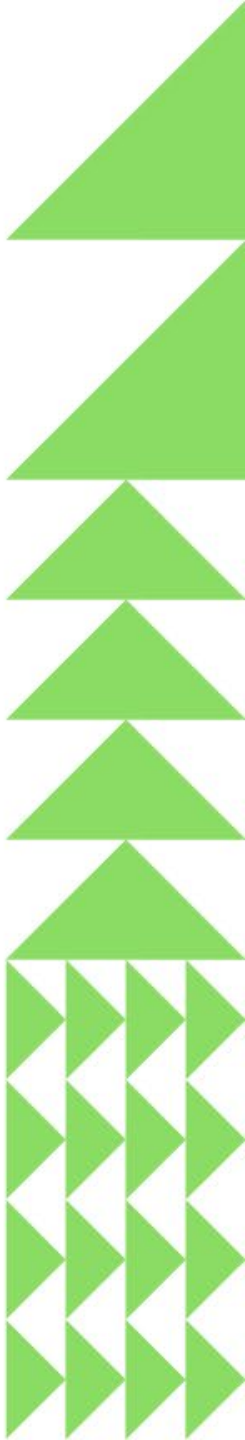
# and challenges

- Time
- Cost
- More important priorities
- Space
- Expertise
- Performativity
- Curriculum
- Risk management, ratios
- Outdoor clothing
- ...
- ...



# Rationale for research

- Gap in knowledge about how teachers see the outdoor classroom; how and why they are using it (Rickinson et al, 2004; Hawxwell et al, 2019)
- More research data needed on evidence of practice and interventions on types and volume of activity (Fiennes et al, 2015)
- Better understanding needed of breadth and depth of outdoor learning practice to encourage the development and use of good practice and raise the value placed on outdoor learning (Institute for Outdoor Learning (IOL), 2018)
- Opportunity to explore change over time (22 years) with different curricula & governance





# Method

Replicate surveys of state primary schools in England  
1995 (n=61) and 2017 (n=40)

Postal questionnaires completed by teachers about outdoor  
education/outdoor learning provision in their schools

Response rate overall of 40% ( 60%, 1995; 20% 2017);  
Replicate response rate: 11%

## Differentiation of phases

- Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (0-5 yrs)
- Key Stage 1 (KS1) (5-7 yrs)
- Key Stage 2 (KS2) (7-11 yrs)

## & locations

- urban
- suburban
- rural



# Analysis

Descriptive analysis of quantitative data for order and variation  
(ranking questions, closed questions)

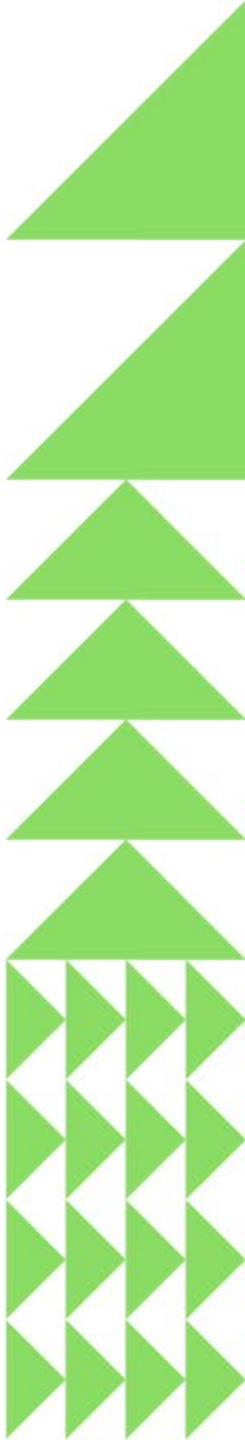
Thematic analysis of qualitative data, codes and themes  
(open responses)



# Locations



Rank	1995	2017
1	Playgrounds (95%) [n=58]	Playgrounds (88%) [n=35]
2	Day visits (87%) [n=53]	Day visits (83%) [n=33]
3	Local area – built (79%) [n=48]	Residentials (78%) [n=31]
4	Other school grounds (74%) [n=45]	Other school grounds (75%) [n=30]

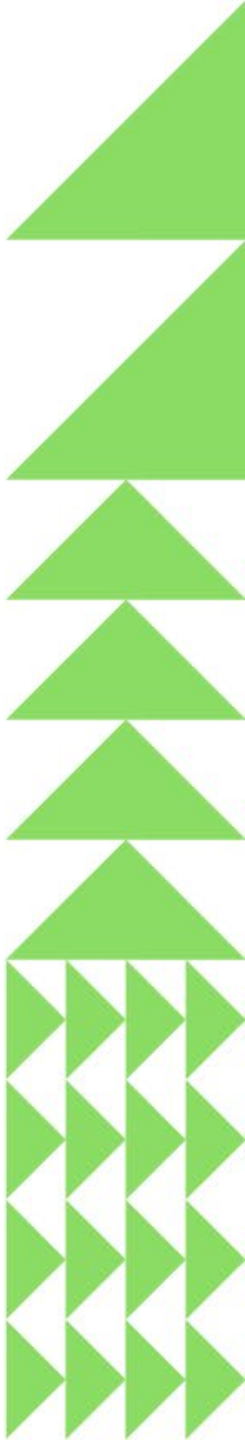




# Curriculum areas



Rank	1995	2017
1	Geography (100%) [n= 61]	Physical education (83%) [n=33]
2	Science (95%) [n=58]	Science (80%) [n=32]
3	Environmental education (93%) [n=57]	Geography (78%) [n=31]
4	Outdoor education (75%) [n=46]	PSHE (70%); Environmental education (70%) [n=28;28]

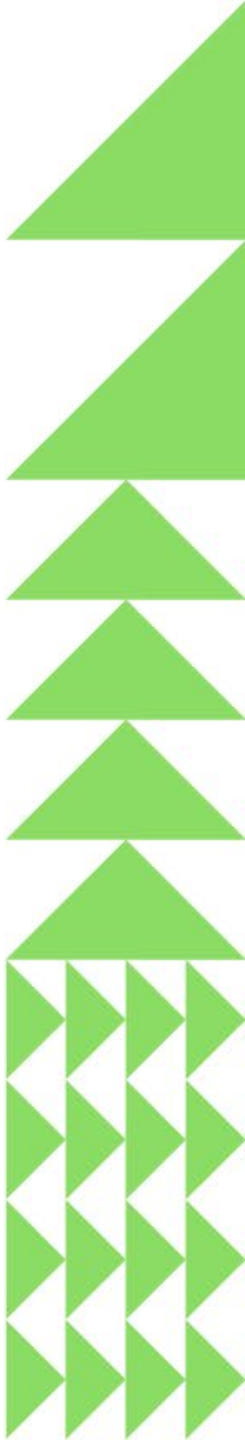




# Stated teacher expertise



	1995	2017
Yes	53% [n=32]	41% [n=16]
No	47% [n=29]	59% [n=24]

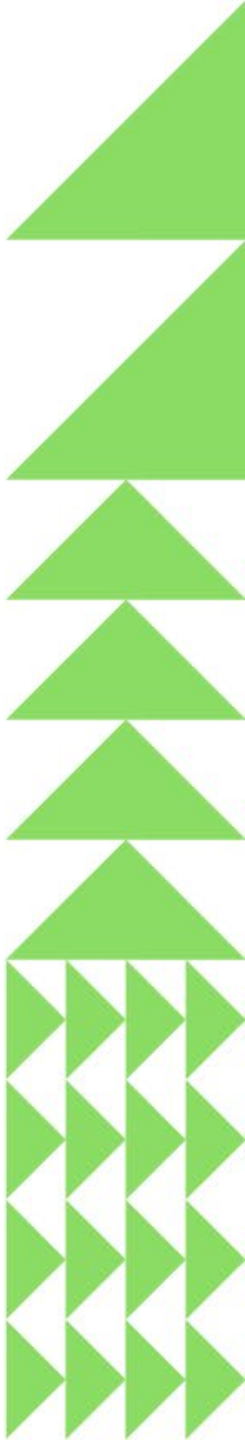




# Outdoor learning as optimum



Rank	1995	2017
1	Environmental Education/Nature	PSE including teamwork
		Physical Education/Physical Activity





# Policies or curriculum change helping or hindering outdoor learning?

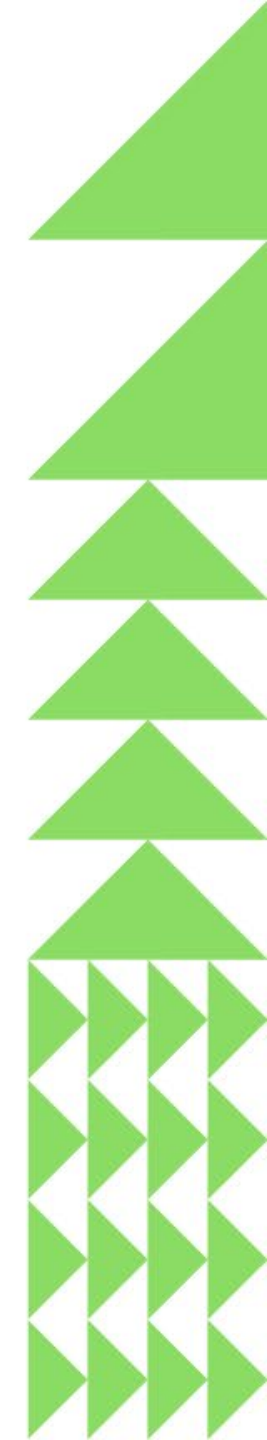


**Helped**

**Leader training, Forest School,  
access**

**Hindered**

**Budget, paperwork, buildings**

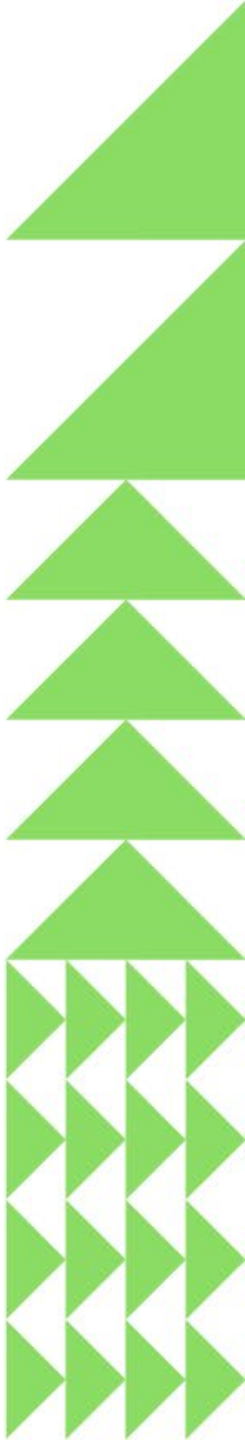




# Factors influencing provision



Rank	1995	Diff. in mean rank	2017	Diff. in mean rank
1	Expense		Time	
2	Time	0.08	Expense	0.28
3	Weather	0.44	Expertise	0.28
4	More important priorities	0.57	More important priorities	0.46



# Place of outdoor learning in the curriculum



Rank	1995	2017
1	A subject/approach to learning in its own right	Included in PE as outdoor and adventurous activities
2	Included in PE as outdoor and adventurous activities	For personal, social (and health) education
3	For personal, social (and health) education	A subject/approach to learning in its own right
4	Taught through geography	Taught through geography





“Life is not computer generated or all about social media, it’s about ...”





“...connecting with people face to face ...”





“...connecting with environments ...”





“...getting dirty ...”



“...experiencing real things and making memories.”





# Comparative studies

**Expense** was highest ranking barrier to teaching outdoor education (Zink & Boyes, 2006). Is this because teachers choose to travel to facilities or expertise at a distance from schools? (Remington & Legge, 2017)

Teachers report a desire to implement 'out of school' learning but '**financial** arrangements' and 'fitting the activities into the **syllabus**' are major constraints (Füz, 2018)

Positive teacher attitude but barriers are bureaucracy, lack of **time**, rigid curriculum, safety & risk assessments, lack of support, **cost** (Nemitsa, 2017)

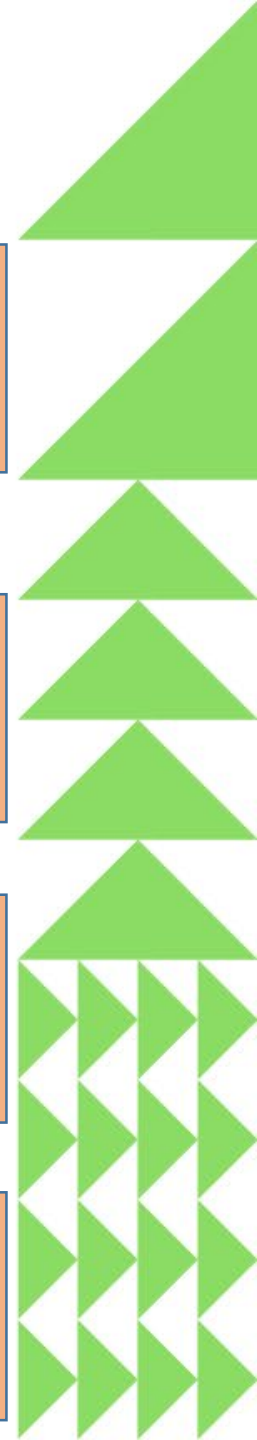
Dyment (2005) found barriers of teacher confidence & expertise, requirements of school **curricula** and wider curriculum reform (as Rickinson et al, 2004) and competition from other curriculum areas

New Zealand

Hungary

Cyprus

Canada



# Good practice – making it happen

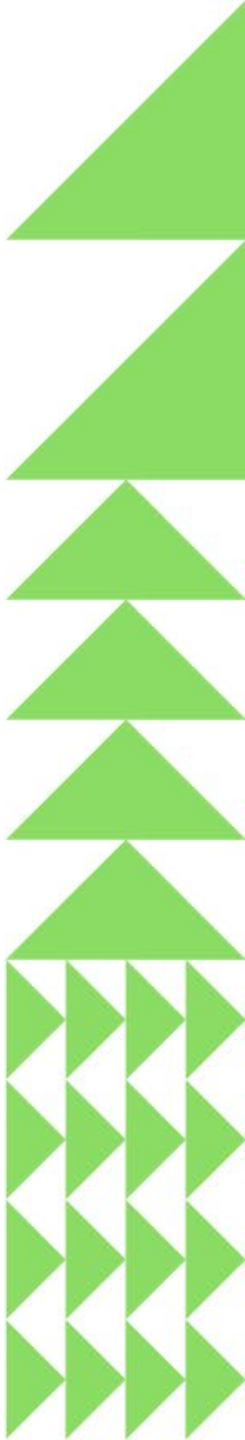
The strength of teachers' values and beliefs

“We believe that children often learn better outside the classroom. The factors do not hinder us. We aim to be outside as much as possible.”  
(rural)



“We take the learning outdoors at every opportunity.”  
(urban - no expertise declared in this school.)

“There are no factors that would prevent us from learning outside - we would find somewhere.” (rural)





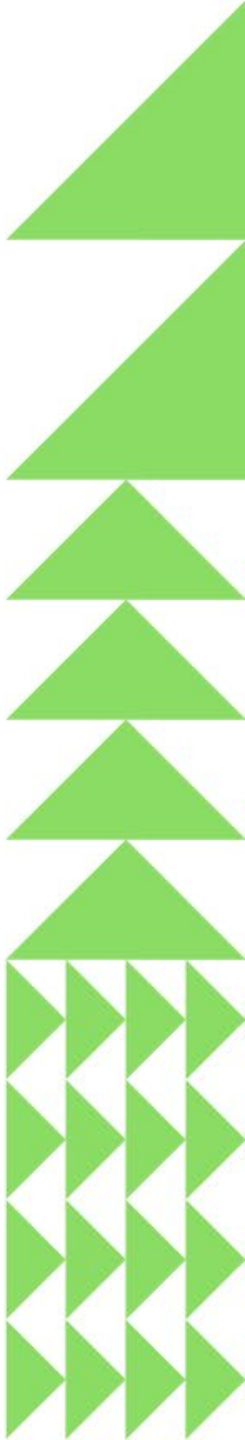
# Good practice – making it happen

## An open approach to curriculum interpretation

“I think outdoor education is an approach to delivering a range of curriculum objectives across all subjects.”  
(rural)



“Our aim is to provide interesting, exciting and experiential learning in every subject - a visit, trip or visitor every topic/subject.”  
(urban)



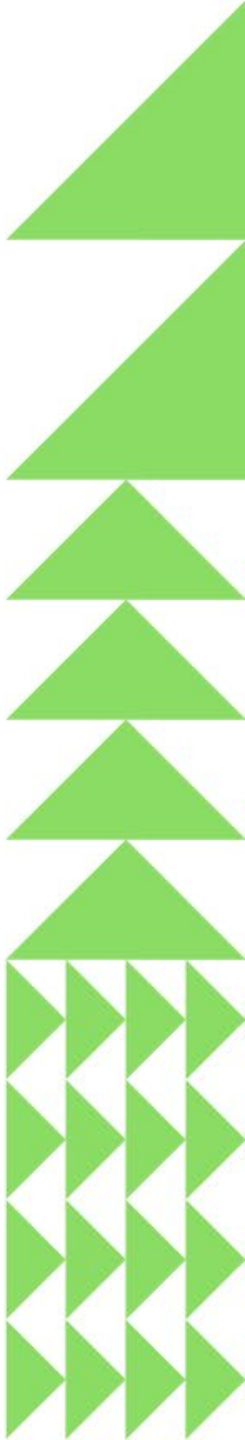


# Good practice – making it happen

## A suitable location

Well-resourced, safe, accessible

“In EYFS we use the outdoors every day and encourage the children to take the learning from inside to the outdoor areas. E.g. baking - mud kitchen. PE - bouldering wall.” (rural)





# Good practice – making it happen

## Culture of risk benefit

“Risk assessments and paperwork have previously restricted use of the outdoor area around school. EYFS team effort has made it possible over the last few years”. (suburban, SEN/D school)





# Good practice – making it happen

## Positive initiatives

School clusters

‘Step Outside’  
quality mark

Forest School

‘Forest Fridays’

Beach School



‘No Child Inside’  
‘Every Child  
Outdoors’  
‘CIDIO’

‘Grandparents  
Gardening Week’

Natural Connections  
demonstration  
school





# Summary of research

- Schools are continuing to use their playgrounds and day visits as locations for practice
- Proportionate increase in residential visits in 2017
- Teacher expertise in schools had decreased by 2017
- Major challenges and barriers to implementation of time and expense remain similar in both years.
- Teachers no longer see outdoor education as a subject in its own right but as part of the physical education curriculum ('outdoor and adventurous activities'); Early Years Foundation Stage practitioners report an enabling curriculum for outdoor learning.



# Enabling good practice

Five key ingredients for successful outdoor education in primary schools:

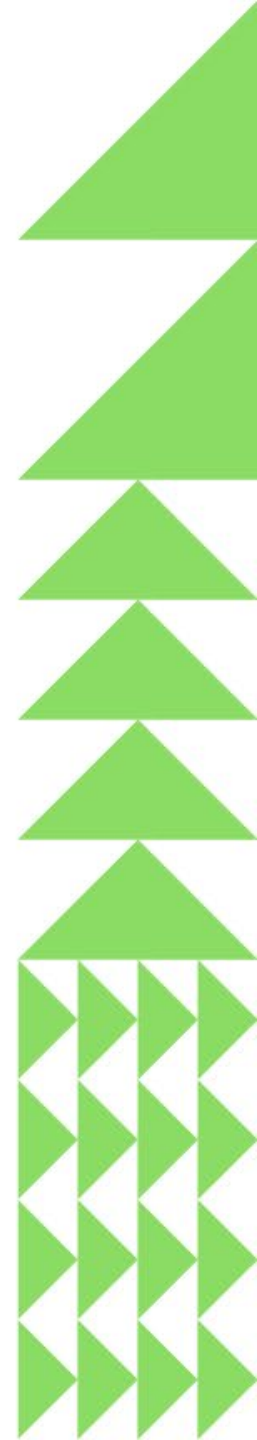
- the strength of teachers' values and beliefs
- an open approach to curriculum interpretation
- the importance of suitable locations
- a culture of risk benefit
- positive initiatives







Thank you





# References

Ager, J. (2019). Can I do it outside? How to introduce a CIDIO approach in a primary school. *Horizons*, 84, 33-35.

Defra (2018). *A green future: Our 25 year environment plan to improve the environment*.

Available at:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf)

Dyment, J. (2005). Green school grounds as sites for outdoor learning: Barriers and opportunities. *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 14(1), 28-45.

Fiennes, C. *et al.* (2015). *The existing evidence base about the effectiveness of outdoor learning*. London: Giving Evidence; University College London.

Füz, N. (2018). Out-of-school learning in Hungarian primary education: Practice and barriers. *Journal of Experiential Education*. Doi:10.1177/1053825918758342.

Hawxwell, L., O'Shaughnessy, M., Russell, C. & Shortt, D. (2019). 'Do you need a kayak to learn outside?': A literature review of learning outside the classroom. *Education 3-13*, 47(3), 322-332.





# References

- Institute for Outdoor Learning (2018). *Outdoor learning research. Evolving research and practice development in outdoor learning*. Retrieved from <https://www.outdoor-learning-research.org/Research/Research-Reports>
- Nemitsa, K. (2017). *Primary education teachers' attitudes and practice towards outdoor learning activities as a means to maximise learning outcomes for primary school children in Cyprus*. (Unpublished master's thesis), University of Cumbria, UK.
- Prince, H.E. (2018). Changes in Outdoor Learning in Primary Schools in England, 1995 and 2017: Lessons for good practice, *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, doi:10.1080/14729679.2018.1548363.
- Remington, T. & Legge, M. (2017). Outdoor education in rural primary schools in New Zealand: a narrative inquiry. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 17(1), 55-66.
- Rickinson, M. *et al.* (2004). *A review of research on outdoor learning*. London: National Foundation for Educational Research & King's College, London.
- Zink, R. & Boyes, M. (2006). The nature and scope of outdoor education in New Zealand schools. *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education*, 10(1), 11-21.

